



RADICAL (EX)CHANGE PROJECT

Belgian National Focus Group

**Organized by
European Multisport Club Association (EMCA)**



Date: 22nd October 2021, 08H30 – 10H30

Place: Online, Zoom platform

A. PARTICIPANTS

• EXPERTS / PANELISTS

The panel of experts consists of 2 academic experts, 1 panelist working with municipalities and another panelist from a nonprofit organization focused on sport in various communities

- **Younis Kamil Abdulsalam** – A PhD researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels; Working for the Hannah-Arendt-Institute as a researcher for the Belgian Red Courts program (developing a program theory on football-based prevention of radicalisation); Sports Scientist and licensed football coach.
 - For purposes of this focus group, he is one of 2 academic experts focusing on radicalization and the program theory that can be applied to all sports to include people from different backgrounds. Also discussed his own personal experience within the sporting community as a volunteer.
- **Ellen Huyge** - Academic expertise is on radicalization/polarization in the Belgian context, conducting research on discrimination in Belgian youth soccer (in cooperation with Royal Belgium Football Association).
 - For purposes of this focus group, she represented one of the 2 academic experts, based on her experience with adolescence from ages 10 -20 years and their parents and communities
- **Maarten De Waele** – Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities; <https://www.vvsg.be/>.
 - For purposes of this focus group, he addressed the role that cities and municipalities have in terms of their policies to address radicalization and racism. He also has personal experience based on his football playing and coaching as a volunteer.
- **Miel Van Haver Beke** - Co-founder of a non-profit called IPitup and the co-inventor of the activity bench. Experience in creating, activating, and unburdening movement-friendly public spaces, to make it easier to access physical activity, so that being active becomes a natural part of daily life again.
 - For purposes of this focus group, he shared his experience in working in underprivileged communities and the role that he sees sport playing in bringing communities together.

• CO-ORDINATORS

- **Gabriella Bascelli** - Project Manager of EMCA (www.multisportclubs.eu); President of the Fondazione SS Lazio 1900
- **Gina Luzzatto** – Secretary General of EMCA

• INVITED PANELISTS FOR DISCUSSION

- **Federico Eichberg** – President of EMCA; Vice President of SS Lazio Multisport Club in Rome.
- **Bojan Mijatovic** - HAŠK Mladost, Zagreb - International Coordinator; IWAS -

Development Commission (Wheelchair fencing) member.

- **Malte Kalsbach** - Head of Club Development and Digitalization at TSV Bayer 04. Master's thesis on the need for digital transformation in sports clubs (obtained from Copenhagen Business School).
- **Martijn Looren De Jongh** - Held various roles and positions in sport industry in last 15 years, from project leader to advisor and at various employers, Royal Netherlands Football Association, The Netherlands Olympic Committee and Feyenoord Rotterdam.
- **Vanina Milanova** – Secretary General of Levski – Sports for All (Bulgaria), President of Assembly of EMCA; PhD in sports marketing for development of professional football.

- **FORMAT OF FOCUS GROUP BASED ON COMBINATION OF EXPERTS AND EXTERNAL PANELISTS**

The Belgium focus group consisted of various Belgium based experts and panellists, with academic backgrounds, working in municipalities or other organisations focused on sport, radicalisation or a combination of both.

In addition to the experts, various members of the EMCA network (based throughout Europe) attended the focus group, sharing their experiences, and asking questions as to how certain issues are addressed within Belgium. This helped facilitate the flow of the discussion and raised a number of key points for the project.

B. FOCUS GROUP - METHODOLOGY

- **First phase: Preparation:** All documents pertaining to the project and the National focus groups were sent to all participants, together with a list of topics to be addressed in either their presentations or in the discussion. Preliminary meeting held with participants to discussion and clarify any queries to ensure a smooth flow of the focus group. The same set of documents was sent to the invited panelists who joined the focus group. The aims of the projects and points of discussion to consider and address are detailed in point C below.
- **Second phase: Focus Group discussion:** The experts and panelists attended the online Belgium focus group coordinated by EMCA. Various presentations were given as to the type of work that each expert is involved in, projects undertaken, and research done. Discussions were held between all panelists and experts. The session was recorded.
- **Third phase: Content Analysis:** The participants' interventions in the Focus Group were analyzed and the various concepts identified, and points raised were noted, recorded herein.

C. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

In order to ensure adequate preparation and to provide thought provoking questions and points prior to the focus group, the following points of discussion were shared with all participants.

- What are the reasons behind radicalization and how do you identify the risks of radicalization?
- Role that sport can play in preventing violent extremism and radicalization?
- Why are youth more at risk and easier to recruit when it comes to radicalization?
- What are the drivers to radicalization and violent extremism, and how do you detect radicalization?
- Is there a systematic process to disengage an individual from radicalization and violent extremism?
- What are some key principles to take into consideration when designing a sport program at preventing violent extremism and detecting radicalization?
- Does gender and diversity play a role when it comes to engaging youngsters in sports-based programs?
- How can sport be used as a tool for social inclusion of people at risk, especially youngsters from radicalization?
- How important is it to involve different stakeholders, community members and other relevant organizations in this day and age to fight radicalization and violent extremism?
- What are the reasons behind radicalization and how do you identify the risks of radicalization?
- What are some of the challenges when engaging with youngsters at risk of radicalization and how do you remedy them through sports or other means?
- What are some of the lessons learned in your field when it comes to preventing violent extremism and radicalization through sport or other means?
- To what extent, if any, do you see similarities, or differences, in the manner that radicalisation is dealt with differently in other European countries
- Any suggestions or recommendations that may be shared from experiences in other European countries on how the issue is addressed via sport, or other means

D. DISCUSSIONS HELD ON RESEARCH AND PROJECTS ALREADY IN OPERATION

1. *Younis Kamil Abdulsalam*

- Working on program theory about how to prevent radicalization through the Belgium Red Court program -presently focusing on football but can be applied to all types of sport. Aimed at youth (18 – 25 years) who are especially at risk of being disconnected from society. Program theory is based on European countries and would not necessarily work in other areas where the social issues are vastly different.
- The program would provide soft skills that can help people against discrimination and deal with racism. The theory tries to identify the underlying mechanism and reasons to understand why certain people are radicalized and how we address it.
- To understand the radicalisation factor, and what will make a person resilient to it, there are 2 types of approaches: Primary prevention and Secondary prevention:
 - o Primary prevention: target groups who are not really in danger at this present time and it aims at preventing any radical ideas forming. Easiest target group to address and approach can be more direct in terms of radicalisation.
 - o Secondary prevention: target groups are for people already in danger of being radicalised and may already have radical ideas. Far more difficult to target these groups and different approaches are needed for this. For these groups, need to approach it from a basis of self-worth, self-promotion, self-esteem and having a “good life perspective”, “taking control of your life” approach.
 - o For both preventative target groups, the principles to apply are empowerment of the individual, dialogue and activities to address issues, program aimed to foster social cohesion and identification and facilitate nonviolent views of certain religions and ideals
- Positive climate is required through mentoring – coaches or mentors with whom there is a very low social distance from target group, in other words, they are at a local level so that they are relatable. Identify a local community champion who is then taking on a leadership role based on what you are teaching them about preventing radicalisation.
- Certain clubs predominately consist of local people (ie Belgium ancestry) while others may be made up of predominately a certain ethnic, religious, or migrate group of persons. For the clubs with majority non-Belgium ancestral people, need to be very careful how to approach the issue of radicalisation as the word alone has a certain stigma to it and will chase away people instead of engaging them in discussion and programs

2. *Ellen Huyge*

- In general, adolescence youth have better more positive view of migration compared to parents who are more rigid in their views
- Terminology used is very important. Radicalisation has a stigma attached to it and is generally associated with a certain view of Muslims. Better to use word “polarisation”.
- To tackle the issue, need to make clubs inclusive.
- Involvement of parents is important as they transmit their views to their children and often feel a sense of disconnection with their society. It is

easier to change the views of children than it is of parents, but it's important that they are all included

- Involving storytelling of ambassadors is good but very important that a relatable, positive narrative is being developed. Not advisable to get high profile successful ambassadors as it is unattainable for youth to achieve that level of success and the expectations are too high. When they fail, their self-esteem is affected and their view of their self-worth decreases, leaving them open to being radicalised/polarised. Also important to show failures of people within their community, who has still managed to succeed in life.
- Not advisable to try inclusiveness and de-polarisation in sport that is competitive as the youth tend to internalise their failure and reach out elsewhere
- Education is the most important issue in order to address extremism and radicalisation. Putting sport and education together should be used

3. **Maarten De Waele**

- He gives support to cities and municipalities in implementing policies against radicalisation. 2 sides to this coordination: one is a security issue, and the other is a social issue. Need to bring these 2 aspects together, to then exchange practices and network ideas.
- Radicalisation as a term is too broad and problematic. It's incredibly difficult to give a list of factors that cause radicalisation as it is not a tailor-made process and is specific to each person's experiences and background
- Try focus on social issues as a main factor instead of radicalisation
- 4 points to focus on:
 - *Social inclusion*: what people want is leisure activities and sport activities to spend time with other people, and here they can meet people from different backgrounds
 - *Counternarrative*: Rather use alternative narratives and make them as close to local level as possible, which are credible and positive
 - *Building resilience and being a support for the person*: work as a team within your community and sport team to show resistance and act against certain types of behaviours, supporting the minorities in your team being targeted
 - *Breaking down barriers between organisation and citizens*: help embrace the different cultures and activities of those in the minority and getting fun activities together with law enforcement for example.
- Most programs he is involved with are with sports more preferable to males and not necessarily for females. But the same concept, and program theory that Younis is working on, can then be applied to sport that both sexes play
- Very important to also look at the good side of radicalisation, meaning that you should also allow people to still embrace their heritage and their roots of where they come from. It is important to find the balance between the positive aspects of accepting people's different roots and culture and the negatives that can then grow from this.
- Radicalisation reduces a person to one aspect of their identity, such as the extreme actions of Muslims, but identity reduction to one negative thing is problematic – need to focus on the multiple layers of one's identity

4. **Miel Van Haver Beke**

- His organisation aims to get people active in an intergenerational manner

- The workbench invention that goes into the community shows the engagement of multiple stakeholders such as the municipalities in this case, inter-generational and differently abled. This can also apply to including people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds
- A lot of well-known people wanted to lend support to the project by being in promotional videos, but this was not done as it is important that people see it can be used by anyone and they rather used role models from the respective communities
- Its also given the communities a sense of pride over the work benches to look after it and a sense of pride of it, which makes them feel like a community.

E. RELEVANT CONCEPTS AND FINDINGS

The following concepts and ideas were identified during the focus group in terms of way to address radicalisation as well as addressing prevention:

1. The inclusion of people from various different ethnic and religious backgrounds in sporting activities is important to try understand the actual mechanisms as to why certain people become radicalised and others not.
2. The role of multi-sport clubs in preventing radicalisation is essential as this provides multiple sporting options which appeal to certain ethnic groups and as a result, a different world's view, therefore more opportunities to "pluralise".
3. Sports-based interventions are part of national football associations and federations initiatives to operate a network facilitating exchanges of knowledge and experiences between different communities and areas in Belgium.
4. The importance of identifying the correct prevention program to implement in the community - Primary versus Secondary Prevention:
 - Need to understand which type of prevention is required in each circumstance.
 - Primary prevention allows for a more direct route to address radicalisation and is easier to address than secondary prevention
 - Secondary prevention focuses more on the self esteem and self-worth of the individual, giving them a great sense of pride in themselves
5. Evidence have shown that leisure activities such as sport activities in a non-competitive environment can significantly improve self-care and social cohesion.
6. A positive climate is created through local mentoring, with people in the community who are mentors and champions for the target groups
 - Not advisable to use high profile mentors to raise awareness to the issue: the success of high-profile mentors is very unlikely to be achieved by the ordinary individual and any failure to achieve similar success will be counterproductive.
 - Rather use mentors who have had both success and failure at a local level and have still been able to overcome the difficulties society has presented them with.
 - The importance of failure and the lessons this teaches the youth is essential
7. Stigma associated with the word "Radicalisation" – in the Belgium context it is often only associated with negative views of Muslims. The terminology itself tends to immediately generate a negative view from individuals and drive the target group further into their radical views.
 - The terminology used influences the character of your study and its conceptualization

- Need to use different terminology to address the issue – proposed the use of “Polarisation” instead of “Radicalisation”
8. The preventive side of things is often overlooked in sports and often the trade-off is in favor of security.
 9. Teaching soft skills to build resistance against episodes of racism and discrimination.
 10. Identifying the programs centered on social skills development for population at risks constitute the first step towards de-radicalization.
 11. Identifying the degree to which radical ideas and movements have spread inside a community constitute the second step towards de-radicalization.
 12. Parents and care givers to be included as far as possible as they project views on their children. Noted that it is more difficult to address radical ideas and the prevention of radicalization in adults.
 - The programs can create a positive ripple effect towards the community so targeting parents means extending the effect to family members and acquaintances.
 13. Use of a competitive sport environment is not encouraged as the defining character of competitive sports can pose a challenge to de-radicalization intents.
 14. One must be careful of the counternarratives used as this can have a negative impact and be counterproductive
 - Counternarratives alter reality and more often than not raise expectations for children playing sports
 15. Focus on social issues overall as opposed to specifically radicalisation – the societal issues lead to the issues that cause radical views
 16. Important to also encourage and foster pride in one’s origins and embrace that. Must not try to completely change a person’s identity as their ethnic origins are a large part of who they are. This needs to be encouraged in a positive manner and not diminished by the deradicalization programs.
 17. Sports-based educational programs can successfully help societies tackle radicalization as education is of utmost importance

F. QUOTES FROM FOCUS GROUP

Some of the quotes extracted from the focus group include the below

- "We need to make our clubs inclusive"
- "Listening to the experience of people is important"
- "When you put sport and education together you get a really good formula"
- "Pluralize to prevent" or "Stronger individuals make stronger communities"
- “Soft skills can help people against discrimination and deal with racism”

G. SCREENSHOTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

